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28 February 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: OBGI Historical Officer

SUBJECT : Typing Corrections on OBGI Histories

Selected pages from OBGI Histories 13 and 14 are being returned to the office for retyping. The use of stick-on correction tape on the permanent publication copy does not meet CIA Historical Staff standards.

[Redacted Signature]

DDI Historical Officer

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE 26 February 1973
TO: Deputy Director for Intelligence		
ROOM NO. 7E44	BUILDING Hqs	
<p>REMARKS: Attached are some over-the-weekend musings stimulated, I imagine, by the current spate of references in the news media, and in our intelligence issuances, to the crisis in "the Middle East"---a regional term toward which I am developing an increasingly strong aversion.</p> <p>I have no illusions that things can be changed overnight. Some of the terms to which I object may be so deeply embedded in our usage that they are almost "immovable objects." Nevertheless, if you consider the ideas to have any practical value, it might be interesting to make copies available to your Office Directors and to ONE.</p>		
FROM:		
ROOM NO. 2F36		

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55

REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

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Toward Improved Precision in Regional Terminology

As an Agency, we tend to be quite alert and responsive to official changes in the names of individual political entities, and to reflect those changes in our intelligence publications. Thus, we were quick to adopt "Zaire" and "Sri Lanka," for example, as standard usage. And we even crossed the barrier--not without some trauma--to the use of "People's Republic of China."

But in our usage of geographic terms to refer to regional--and even ideological--groupings of nations, we persist in adhering to usages that are imprecise, egocentric, and anachronistic. Most commonly these involve the use of longitudinal compass directions as nouns to refer to international groupings.* Consider the following frequently used terms: "the West," "the East," "the Near East," "the Middle East," "the Far East." Such terms are--and always have been--highly imprecise, but they are also increasingly obsolescent, reflecting as they do an egocentric concept of the world as viewed from London and western Europe.

Admittedly, the use of these terms is still widespread and deeply ingrained in our intellectual circles. A number of highly respected journals have the terms as part of their titles, e.g., Far Eastern Economic Review, the Middle East Journal, etc. Some of my colleagues may say, "Everyone knows what the terms mean" (a thoroughly faulty presumption) "so why worry about it?" My response is that we as intelligence officers should always strive to be practitioners of precision in our writing--and these terms are imprecise and susceptible of improvement. Others may point out that [redacted] has always been known as [redacted] and that it would be inconvenient and confusing to change. It is fortunate that that kind of mentality will not make the decisions on the changeover to the metric system!

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*The same problem has not arisen with respect to latitudinal directions--"the North" and "the South." This is due to valid geographical and historical reasons that need not be detailed here. Furthermore, the use of compass directions as adjectives in combination with a continent or country name does not raise the same objections. Thus, "East Europe," "South Asia," "North China," and "West Africa," for example, are acceptable.

The Agency has an opportunity--and a responsibility--to exercise some leadership within the intelligence community in abandoning these shibboleths of imprecision. Finished intelligence issuances from the Directorate of Intelligence and from ONE should certainly lead the way!

I do not propose that change be achieved by dictum, but rather by encouraging responsible managers and supervisors to adopt for themselves and to develop in their writers, reviewers, and editors "a way of thinking" about these terms. Why should we write of "the Far East" when we really mean "East Asia"? Or of "the Middle East deadlock" when we presumably mean "the Arab-Israeli deadlock"? Why speak of "the industrial West" (in a context that includes such widely separated nations as Japan and the United Kingdom) when we really mean "the non-Communist industrial nations"? "South Asia" and "Southeast Asia" are quite acceptable terms; why shouldn't "Southwest Asia" become equally acceptable? Consider the merits of such terms as "the Eastern Mediterranean" and "the Persian Gulf states" as possible refinements of "the Near East" and "the Middle East." The list could go on...

There is reason for hope on this matter. After all, we did manage to outgrow "Sino-Soviet Bloc," which seemed well on its way to becoming a permanently embedded anachronism in our lexicon!

Perhaps the term of administration of a President from California is an appropriate time to recognize and confirm the fact that--whether viewed from Washington or San Clemente (or London or Moscow or Peking)--Japan is not really in the "Far East" or the "Near West" but, simply and more accurately, in "East Asia."

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